

Citation for published version:

Crawford, I, Wang, Z & Liu, L 2020, 'Higher achievers? Mobility programmes, generic skills and academic learning: a UK case study', *Intercultural Education*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 68-86.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.1666246>

DOI:

[10.1080/14675986.2019.1666246](https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.1666246)

Publication date:

2020

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Intercultural Education* on 05/11/2019, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/14675986.2019.1666246>

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Higher achievers? Mobility programmes, generic skills and academic learning: a UK case study

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Abstract

The received wisdom is that mobility programmes considerably contribute to students in terms of the development of generic skills, language and multicultural competence and competitive advantage in global labour market. Surprisingly, the impacts of mobility programmes on academic learning have received very limited research interest in the literature. This study uses students enrolled on international management and modern languages degrees in a British university to investigate the benefits of a yearlong study abroad programme, on the development of linguistic and multicultural skills measured by their academic results pre- and post- international mobility. Using a control group of students who stay on campus, quantitative data drawn from a longitudinal study over eight years conclusively suggest that study abroad students academically outperform control group students after controlling for gender, domicile, ethnicity, socio-economic status, prior academic performance and age. The implications of these results on higher education and policy making are discussed.

Keywords: yearlong study abroad; academic learning; language skills; quantitative methods; control group

Introduction

Increasingly, Europe and many countries around the world endorse international mobility programmes as an important government policy. The Erasmus programme in Europe has facilitated over a quarter of a million students every year to study or work abroad (EC, 2014) while the Erasmus+ programme was set up to double the number of study abroad students in the budgeting period between 2014 and 2020 (EC+Erasmus, 2014). In the United States, the Obama administration invested heavily into “100,000 strong educational exchange initiatives” to encourage more American students studying in strategically important countries such as China and Latin America and the Caribbean (USDS, 2009, 2011). Likewise, Australian universities advocate an inclusion of an international mobility component as part of their degrees (UA, 2013).

Much of the literature studies the educational benefits or the perceived learning outcomes of international mobility programmes in terms of generic skills such as self-management, self-awareness, intercultural understanding, independence, multicultural competence and problem solving using interviews and/or survey (Bótas & Huisman, 2013; Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015; Forsey, Broomhall, & Davis, 2012; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Norris & Gillespie, 2009; Oleksiyenko, Cheng, & Yip, 2013; Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009; Pedersen, 2010; Scarinci & Pearce, 2012; Sutton & Rubin, 2004; Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). Although such investigations are certainly relevant and important, examining the relationship between academic learning and international mobility programmes certainly warrants considerable research attention since they are often part of degree study (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015; Forsey et al., 2012; Hadis, 2005; Pedersen, 2010; Stone & Petrick, 2013; Sutton & Rubin, 2004). International mobility programmes need to prove their academic significance to potential students and stakeholders of higher education (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015). This instigates our

research interest in understanding this little researched area in the literature, that is, the academic learning outcomes of international mobility programmes.

The current study investigates this abiding literature gap by focusing on a particular international mobility programme, yearlong study abroad, partly due to its relatively high costs and an increasing scrutiny from universities and policy makers in the era of austerity and partly because of its considerable educational benefits in terms of strong linguistic gains and progress (Klapper & Rees, 2003, 2004, 2012; Rees & Klapper, 2007). Yearlong study abroad, in this study, is an accredited and compulsory module for the international management and modern languages (shortened to IMML thereafter) degrees in French, German and Spanish in a British institution. The IMML degrees are structured to enable study abroad students to gain the best possible learning outcomes: first, students will learn multicultural and linguistic skills in business from a wide range of modules for two academic years before study abroad; second, the credits and academic results gained in yearlong study abroad will contribute to their final degree results; and finally, yearlong study abroad will give students an opportunity to be fully engaged with local people in study and/or workplace.

This research is imperative for universities which have incorporated yearlong study abroad into degree study. Recent years have seen a decrease in popularity of yearlong study abroad programmes (Dwyer, 2004; Engle & Engle, 2003). The number of students studying abroad for a full academic year declined from 7.3% in 2000/01 to 3.1% in 2012/13 (IIE, 2014). Universities in English-speaking countries can easily attract a large number of international students, though the number of outbound domestic students is relatively small by comparison (Oleksiyenko et al., 2013). The number of outbound UK students is 22,480, equivalent to 1.3% of all UK domiciled undergraduate students in the academic year 2014/15 (GI, 2016). A recent

study shows that the barrier for international mobility is more related to a mind-set than objective external circumstances such as family ties or work commitments (Beerkens, Souto-Otero, de Wit, & Huisman, 2016). It is thus necessary to examine the effects of yearlong study abroad on academic learning in terms of linguistic and multicultural skills. If students are aware that they can academically benefit from yearlong study abroad, more might be encouraged to participate. Additionally, evidence of substantial academic gains would justify the costs of yearlong study abroad to universities, funding bodies and policy makers alike.

This paper first starts with the literature on the effects of mobility programmes on personal, linguistic and academic skills. Second, the study scope includes the rationales for selecting study abroad participants and the control group as well as the methodologies for data analyses. Third, the academic performance differences among yearlong study abroad students and between them and their control group counterparts before and after study abroad are examined and reported. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the implications of the findings and areas for further research identified.

Literature review

The world is on the move (Van't Klooster, Van Wijk, Go, & Van Rekom, 2008). Globalisation without doubt demands a high cultural interdependency at the macro level and intercultural communication at the individual level (Fritz, Möllenberg, & Chen, 2002). Language skills are necessary for intercultural understanding and open doors for commerce and business (Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Van't Klooster et al., 2008). In particular, studying, living and traveling in countries where a person's second language is spoken would greatly enhance intercultural communication skills, multicultural competence and his/her ability to engage with the specific cultural nuances of the native speakers (Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Varela & Gatlin-Watts,

2014). The importance of study abroad on the development of language and intercultural skills is highlighted by a recent large scale study using European Erasmus students (Jacobone & Moro, 2015).

Similar to other extra-curricular activities such as placements or internships, mobility programmes can help students develop personal efficacy such as self-management, independence, teamwork, decision making and better language skills as well as desirable employability skills such as intercultural communication skills and multinational competence due to experiential and situation learning environments whilst abroad (Scarinci & Pearce, 2012; Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). Studying whilst travelling is an age-old path which has been trodden by scholars, immigrants and merchants since the second century BC (Ward, Bochner, & Furham, 2001). Unlike formal classrooms, travel such as study abroad enables authentic lifelong learning processes through informal contacts with local people (Falk, Ballantyne, Packer, & Benckendorff, 2012; Forsey et al., 2012; LaTorre, 2011; Mitchell, 1998; Stone & Petrick, 2013; Towner, 1985).

The formal classroom environments do not often offer students realistic opportunities to acquire desirable behavioural and communication skills (Milter & Stinson, 1995) which have been regarded as important employability skills in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, along with teamwork, problem solving, decision making and the ability to intelligently apply knowledge in the workplace (Clarke, 1997; Dearing, 1997; DEST, 2002). The travel literature shows that students can develop and improve personal, communication and other desirable employability skills by undertaking field trips, work placements and internships locally and internationally (Blackwell, Lindsey, Harvey, Hesketh, & Knight, 2001; Cranmer, 2006; Pearce & Foster, 2007; Scarinci & Pearce, 2012; Van't Klooster et al., 2008).

The mobility experience gives students chances to apply knowledge and skills learned at their home university to overseas academic and work place scenarios and provides an arena in which to reflect on these interacting experiences, therefore resulting in learning from such close encounters and practicing what they have learnt in real life situations (Coetzee & Bester, 2009; Dewey, 1938; Gmelch, 1997; Kolb, 1984; Mouton, 2002; O'Reilly, 2006).

The relationship between mobility and the significant development of personal and employability skills is far from straightforward and the literature paints a mixed picture (Brown, 2009; Feinberg, 2002; Forsey et al., 2012; Pedersen, 2010; Stronkhorst, 2005; Vande Berg, 2007; Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). Anecdotally, students who mostly benefit from mobility programs are self-sufficient learners with the requisite language proficiency and the ones who can engage well with the local culture (Vande Berg, 2007). Personal and cultural changes are less likely to happen among students on short-term study abroad programmes (Feinberg, 2002; Forsey et al., 2012; Hottola, 2004; Pizam, Jafari, & Milman, 1991) while students on longer-term programmes or having multiple international trips evidently gain higher skill, personal and behaviour improvements than short-term study abroad or on campus students (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Scarinci & Pearce, 2012). A survey study of 684 business students from Northwood University observes significant developments of generic business skills such as effective communication skills, decision making, adaptability and feeling comfortable with all sorts of people etc. among students who take four or more international trips (Scarinci & Pearce, 2012).

The degree of change wrought in international travel is arguably a function of the purpose and duration of trip undertaken (Brown, 2009). Motivation plays a vital role in learning through travel as youth high school students develop most in aspects which motivated them to

participate in an international exchange (Bachner & Zeuschel, 2009). Backpackers with an intention to broaden their education are different from the mass tourist for being open, flexible and tolerant (Muzaini, 2006; O'Reilly, 2006). Unlike tourism, mobility programmes are often initiated, promoted and sponsored by political and regional policies and higher education strategies (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015; Papatsiba, 2005). Surprisingly, political, educational and economic motivations have limited influence on participants. Interviews with Erasmus students financed by a French regional scheme show that participants are motivated by the desire to seek an intense personal experience and give a low priority to the process of cultural and political transmission and development of European identity (Papatsiba, 2005). It echoes with the results of Dall'Alba and Sidhu (2015) who find that the most cited motivation to participate in an Australian university mobility programme is to gain a life experience looking for adventure, fun and freedom, taking a break from everyday study, and stepping outside comfort zones and/or familiar life while academic learning is hardly featured in a range of motivations reported by participants.

Since not all mobility students are motivated by academic learning, it is necessary to identify the most suitable types of mobility students which can be used for this research. Prior studies show that academic learning can be best investigated by using students studying foreign language or foreign language in combination with a degree in commerce, social science or law in UK universities, since study abroad is not a holiday or ad hoc learning experience for them and their academic performance before, during and after study abroad is credited and assessed by third-party and independent academics in the home institution (Klapper & Rees, 2003, 2004, 2012; Rees & Klapper, 2007). The third-party assessment results can help to overcome a major weakness in the literature measuring the developments of multicultural skills of mobility programmes, that is, the sole reliance on self-reported interviews and/or survey results. Self-

assessments of knowledge are likely to be influenced by narcissism (John & Robins, 1994), affectively laden (Sitzmann, Ely, Brown, & Bauer, 2010) and rhetorical sensitivity (Ang et al., 2007). Since self-assessments of knowledge do not always correlate with academic learning, Sitzmann *et al.* (2010) suggest that knowledge tests and rated performance by instructors should be used to measure student learning of particular skills following training or educational programmes. So far, only a handful of prior studies use third-party assessment results to reveal the academic learning outcomes of study abroad on linguistic skills and progress rates (Hernández, 2010; Klapper & Rees, 2003, 2004, 2012; Rees & Klapper, 2007).

An exceptional interview study uses the interview results collected from Erasmus agents to assess academic achievement of Polish mobility students (Bótas & Huisman, 2013). The agents report a positive impact of Erasmus programmes on students' academic achievement, but, at the same time, these students have a low degree completion rate as they prefer to remain in highly paid jobs secured through the Erasmus programme. Their findings should be interpreted with great caution due to a very small sample size and contradicting evidence regarding academic achievement. On the other hand, quantitative studies show the significant and positive impacts of study abroad on linguistic gains and progress rates (Klapper & Rees, 2003, 2004, 2012; Rees & Klapper, 2007). Motivation is important in determining the development levels of linguistic and multicultural skills during study abroad (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Holtbrügge & Engelhard, 2016; Klapper & Rees, 2012; Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). The difference between top performers and bottom performers, who are clustered by the improvements of two German language tests before and after study abroad, is greatly explained by the motivation factor measured by achievement drive, initiative, optimism and perseverance (Klapper & Rees, 2012). These four elements of motivations echo the three dimension motivation measurements, namely, self-efficacy, perseverance and curiosity in the cultural

intelligence literature investigating the learning outcomes of advancing multicultural competence via study abroad (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Holtbrügge & Engelhard, 2016; Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014).

Study scope

The above literature review disclosures a significant research gap, that is, the formal academic learning of multicultural skills apart from linguistic developments is rarely measured by third-party and independent tutors or observers. To explore the effects of mobility programmes on academic learning of linguistic and multicultural skills, this research selects the IMML students who have comparable prior learning experiences and nearly identical UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) points and every student on the IMML degree programmes spent a substantial compulsory year studying and/or working in a foreign country. The IMML degrees in French, German and Spanish are four-year institution-wide language programmes in combination with business and management. Therefore, students on the IMML degree programmes have strong motivation to develop both linguistic and multicultural skills.

The IMML degrees are offered by a research intensive management school in one of the top 10 UK universities so are able to apply consistent and high entry requirements on both UK and international students since 1998. Furthermore, the IMML programmes aim to make students into future business leaders and managers who could combine management and language skills with the ability to function effectively in an international business environment. All registered students are informed upon entry of the importance of yearlong study abroad on the development of intercultural understanding and language skills. To prepare students for yearlong study abroad, the degrees provide systematic and academically certified cross-cultural training through a wide range of compulsory modules from language, culture and society to

business and management theories and practices for two years. Students then take a yearlong study abroad in the third year in countries where French, German and Spanish are officially spoken.

To examine the effects of yearlong study abroad on academic learning of the IMML students, this study uses quantitative data collected by the university. The quantitative approach is borrowed from the placement literature which examines student academic learning through placements by analysing the differences in academic results before and following placements while controlling for gender, age and domicile (Crawford & Wang, 2016; Crawford, Wang, & Andrews, 2016; Gomez, Lush, & Clements, 2004; Jones, Green, & Higson, 2015; Mandilaras, 2004; Mansfield, 2011; Surridge, 2009). The quantitative approach complements the study abroad literature in three ways. First, the quantitative approach is able to explore the whole student population on the IMML programmes while survey and interviews often attract a very low response rate from the student population, in particular, if participants are asked to fill in the survey twice (before and after mobility) (Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). Second, the survey results are skewed towards positive outcomes due to the fact that less satisfied students might not respond to the survey (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015). Finally, academic results are awarded by third-party and independent tutors so are not affected by statistical biases included in self-assessed survey and interviews.

A longitudinal and quantitative study was conducted to utilise all IMML students who successfully completed yearlong study abroad and graduated from 2008 to 2014. For comparison, a control group was formed to include all full-time students graduating during the same time period and attending the same management school but not participating in any kinds of mobility programmes during their degree study periods. The statistical analyses also

consider the effects of socio-economic status and ethnicity on academic learning, following the literature reporting the performance differences between white and minority students in UK higher education (Richardson, 2008, 2012) and the high participation level in study abroad among upper middle class students (Scarinci & Pearce, 2012; Waters & Brooks, 2010). The student data such as graduation status, graduation year, study abroad participation and personal data such as nationality, gender, age, socio-economic status and ethnicity as well as module results and average yearly marks for both IMML students and full-time students were collected through the registry. In total, 579 IMML students and 236 full-time students were identified and used for quantitative analyses.

The effects of yearlong study abroad on academic learning were examined using t-tests and multiple regressions. Academic learning was represented by academic results ranging from 40 to 100. Academic learning in terms of linguistic skills was represented by the results obtained on core and compulsory language modules while multicultural skills were measured by the yearly average marks pre- and post- yearlong study abroad. The t-tests provided preliminary analyses on the IMML students by comparing their academic performance before and after study abroad and to that of control group students. Multiple regressions were able to calculate and analyse the impact of many independent variables such as age, nationality, gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity on dependent variables, the final year academic marks used for t-tests. Following the literature (Crawford & Wang, 2015; Gomez et al., 2004; Mansfield, 2011; Surridge, 2009), the year 2 averages and results of core and compulsory language modules were respectively included in the regressions to control for any known pre-existing academic performance differences.

The rest of the independent variables for regressions were structured and coded as follows. Age was recorded in years reflecting how old the students were on entry, while gender (male=0; female=1) and ethnicity (white=1; others=0) were both dummy coded. Similarly, yearlong study abroad was a dummy variable which took 1 if the student was enrolled for the IMML degrees, zero otherwise. Social class was measured based on the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) which was developed by the UK Office for National Statistics from 2004 onwards (ONS, 2005). The categories of socioeconomic status were listed below from the highest NS-SEC 1 to the lowest NS-SEC 8: NS-SEC 1: higher managerial and professional (large employers and higher managerial and profession occupations); NS-SEC 2: Lower managerial and professional occupations; NS-SEC 3: intermediate occupations; NS-SEC 4: small employers and own account workers; NS-SEC 5: lower supervisory and technical occupations; NS-SEC 6: semi-routine occupations; NS-SEC 7: routine occupations and NS-SEC 8: never worked and long-term unemployed (ONS, 2005, 2010). Following prior research (Croxford & Raffe, 2015; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2010), upper middle class was represented by the highest social class category, NS-SEC 1, which took 1 if one of the student's parents belonged to NS-SEC 1, zero otherwise.

The initial sample included 815 graduates of whom 71 percent completed yearlong study abroad and 29 percent finished full-time study without any work or study break within or outside the UK, as shown in Table 1. In terms of gender, the IMML student group was very similar to the control group, with a relatively higher female presence approaching 60 percent. The female participation percentage was a little higher than the 55 percent national average in UK higher education (HESA, 2014) though was in line with 62 percent female participation reported by Dall'Alba and Sidhu (2015). Both the IMML student population and the control group have a higher proportion of international students, 28 and 73 percent, than the 13 percent

national average for non-UK enrolment among undergraduates (HESA, 2014). Likewise, the majority of students were aged between 18 and 20 years on entry for both groups (98% and 87% respectively), which was higher than the national average of 68 percent (HESA, 2014).

In terms of socio-economic status and ethnicity, the UK UCAS allowed students to decide whether or not to disclose such background information to the university. Thus, ethnicity and social class were self-reported and a large number of full-time students, 77%, did not report such background information to the university while 35% of the IMML students adopted the same approach. Based on students who reported their socio-economic status and/or ethnicity, 25% of the IMML and 7% of full-time students were from the upper middle class. The direct comparisons between the IMML and full-time non-mobility students suggested that upper middle class students were more willing to spend a year abroad than the rest of the social classes.

Insert Table 1 here

Results

T-test results reported in Table 2 were centred on the academic differences among and between the control group and yearlong study abroad students from the second year to the final year. The control group suffered from an insignificant 0.11 mark (out of 100) reduction from year 2 to the final year. On the other hand, yearlong study abroad IMML students greatly improved linguistic and multicultural skills given that their academic results on language modules as well as on average increased by 3.27 and 1.94 marks out of 100, respectively, both significant at 1% level. Moreover, study abroad students consistently outperformed the control group in both year 2 and final year, ranging from 3.63 and 4.33 marks in the second year to 7.03 and 6.38 marks in the final year. The academic performance differences between full-time non-mobility and study abroad students were statistically significant at 1% level. These results indicated not

only the significant impact of study abroad on the academic learning of participants but also the pre-existing difference in academic drive which was one aspect of motivation (Klapper & Rees, 2012).

Insert Table 2 here

The regressions were run twice here due to the large number of sample students with missing data points for socio-economic status and/or ethnicity, which reduced the sample size from 815 to 431. The determinants of academic learning in terms of linguistic and multicultural skills were examined first by using three individual factors such as age, gender and nationality because such information were available for all 815 sample students. The results were reported in Table 3. The data was tested for normality, linearity and homoscedasticity, independence of errors and multicollinearity and no assumptions underpinning the regression analyses were violated. Two regression models were both significant at 1% level and showed that four out of five independent variables significantly explained 62 or 64 percent of final year language and average marks. Gender was the only independent variable which had an insignificant impact on academic learning. Year 2 language or average mark, domicile and study abroad were positively related while age had a negative but less than 1 mark (out of 100) impact on academic learning both before and after yearlong study abroad. Among all independent variables, study abroad had the statistically biggest size effect on student final year average and language marks.

Insert Table 3 here

The results of regressions using 431 sample students with all data points for socio-economic status and ethnicity were shown in Table 4. Two regression models were both significant at 1% level explained 47 or 57 percent of final year language and average marks and showed that only three independent variables, year 2 language or average mark, mobility and age were consistently significant. Consistent with the results in Table 3, study abroad had the statistically biggest size effect on student final year average and language marks. After including socio-

economic status and ethnicity, domicile was no longer significant though white students were able to outperform minority students in the final year by about 1 mark. The regression results in Table 4 should be interpreted with caution. The explanatory powers of these two regressions were lower than those in Table 3, the sample size was much reduced due to missing data points and white British students were more likely to report both of their socio-economic status and ethnicity than the rest of the students.

Insert Table 4 here

Discussions and conclusion

The unique contribution of this study to the literature is to quantitatively discriminate the significant effects of yearlong study abroad, a special type of international mobility programme, on academic learning using assessment marks awarded by independent and third-party university lecturers. Proof of such developmental power naturally carries both theoretical and practical implications for the future construction, conceptualisation and funding of mobility programmes in higher education.

Theoretically, substantive institutional commitment and significant claims have been made by universities and administrators in terms of academic gains through mobility programmes which must be empirically substantiated (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015; Forsey et al., 2012). Consistent with previous studies (Ife, 2000; Klapper & Rees, 2003, 2012; Rees & Klapper, 2007), the findings reveal statistically significant gains on the development of linguistic skills following yearlong study abroad. Additionally, evidence strongly supports the improvements of multicultural skills after yearlong study abroad. Study abroad students are found to be more academically motivated than full-time non-mobility students because of their better academic performance prior to yearlong study abroad. **The significant performance difference between study abroad and full-time students prior to mobility indicates that higher achievers gravitate**

towards mobility programmes. It is thus necessary to statistically control pre-mobility academic ability when examining the impact of mobility on academic learning. The regression results, after controlling for mobility participation representing motivation, pre-mobility or year 2 academic performance, gender, age, nationality, socio-economic status and ethnicity, show statistically positive effects of study abroad on academic learning one year after mobility. The findings here suggests that mobility experience generates significant academic benefits to participants.

This empirical study provides much needed support for piecemeal anecdotal evidence that international mobility help students develop intercultural understanding and multicultural skills. In particular, our results show that UK domicile students academically benefit more than international students from yearlong study abroad. To date, the internationalisation of UK higher education has been largely focused on selling UK education to overseas students while policy makers and universities have paid very little attention to the implications of sending UK students abroad (Waters & Brooks, 2010). UK universities and government should invest more on yearlong study abroad since such programmes would enable the UK to develop a generation of skilled workforce who can successfully conduct business internationally. This is extremely relevant at this stage of Brexit.

The respective sizes of mark gains on language which is a minor component of the IMML degrees and modules related to the social and cultural elements of their chosen foreign languages as well as business and management theories and practices are not uniform in this study. In our view, linguistic skills are differently acquired from multicultural, business and management skills because the former is linked to the development of metacognitive and cognitive cultural intelligence while the latter to motivational and behavioural cultural

intelligence which can only be effectively achieved by breaking through comfort boundaries and engaging in meaningful interactions with locals (Pettigrew, 1998; Van't Klooster et al., 2008; Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). Further, results suggest that gender plays no role in determining language learning process, similar to Klapper and Rees (2012). There is no significant performance difference between males and females on academic learning of multicultural skills.

Our results support the important role of motivation in academic learning. Students who have higher linguistic and multicultural skills before study abroad reap the highest linguistic and academic rewards subsequently, which is in line with the previous observation that the learning effects of international mobility programmes are likely to be limited without much preparation and guidance (Stronkhorst, 2005; Vande Berg, 2007) and the study abroad experience is unlikely to modify pre-existing attitudes such as motivation and behaviours (Rees & Klapper, 2007; Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). The highly motivated students evidently learn more linguistic skills than students with low motivation levels during study abroad, consistent with the literature (Klapper & Rees, 2012; Rees & Klapper, 2007). The significant correlation of years 2 and 4 academic results indicates to universities, funding organisations and policy makers that the compulsory linguistic training for mobility students is vital in achieving the best academic learning outcomes if their mother tongue is not the official language in the host country.

This study has its limitations. One limitation is the use of a non-experimental control group. Because all students on IMML degrees complete yearlong study abroad, we resort to choosing a non-equivalent control group. The central concern is the difficulty to interpret results (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Yearlong study abroad students significantly outperform the control group

before and after mobility. Although, the individual and academic differences between these two groups are controlled in regressions, the results must be carefully generalized in light of the characteristics of the control group and the possibly unobserved and uncontrolled factors on their academic performance. We call for more research examining the underlying relationships between mobility programmes and academic gains, using experimental sampling and controlling for motivation levels between mobility students and control group students.

Another limitation is related to the exclusion of students who failed to progress at some stages of study so as not to complete their degrees. Much of the quantitative higher education literature adopts full-case analyses by focusing only on students with complete data points, which could dramatically influence the statistical results (Cox, McIntosh, Reason, & Terenzini, 2014). Likewise, the developments of linguistic skills before and after study abroad are routinely examined without students who did not complete language tests (Hernández, 2010; Klapper & Rees, 2012; Rees & Klapper, 2007) while studies investigating the impact of study abroad on the development of personal and cross-cultural skills are unable to include all participants due to the voluntary nature of survey (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015; Holtbrügge & Engelhard, 2016; Varela & Gatlin-Watts, 2014). Compared with a low 22% of survey response rate (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015), this study utilises 93% of the study abroad student population which would enhance reliability of statistical analyses. The validity of our results is partly supported by previous studies which note significant developments of academic skills such as linguistic fluency following study abroad (Hernández, 2010; Klapper & Rees, 2012; Rees & Klapper, 2007). More research should be carried out to identify the underlying academic and personal reasons of study abroad students who did not complete mobility programmes and degrees.

In conclusion, this study validates the relationship between yearlong study abroad and academic learning, though the impacts of yearlong study abroad on linguistic and multicultural

skills are somewhat different. To further understand the impacts of mobility programmes on the development of linguistic and multicultural skills, interview and survey studies regarding situation and experimental learning in real life business and managerial settings should be carried out.

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Table 1 Characteristics of the IMML student group and control group

	Study abroad		Full-time		Total
	No.	Percent	No	Percent	
No. graduates	579	71%	236	29%	815
Gender					
Females	350	60%	140	59%	490
Males	229	40%	96	41%	325
Domicile					
UK	415	72%	64	27%	479
International	164	28%	172	73%	336
Age group					
18-20	565	98%	206	87%	771
21 and above	14	2%	30	13%	44
Socio-economic status-NS-SEC					
NS-SEC1-Higher managerial and professional occupations	146	25%	16	7%	162
NS-SEC2-Lower managerial and professional occupations	133	23%	17	7%	150
NS-SEC3-Intermediate occupations	48	8%	6	3%	54
NS-SEC4-Small employers and own account workers	23	4%	4	2%	27
NS-SEC5-Lower supervisory and technical occupations	5	1%	1	0%	6
NS-SEC6-Semi-routine occupations	19	3%	9	4%	28
NS-SEC7-Routine occupations	5	1%	2	1%	7
NS-SEC8-Never worked and long-term unemployed	0	0%	0	0%	0
9-Not reported	200	35%	181	77%	381
Ethnicity					
White	428	74%	48	20%	476
Non-white	41	7%	72	31%	113
Not reported	110	19%	116	49%	226

Table 2 T-test results of academic performance differences between year 2 and final year

Paired sample T-tests				
	Y2 average	Final Y average	Diff. final year- year 2	Sig (p-value)
Full-time	58.54	58.42	-0.11	0.76
Language (Lang)	Y2 Lang	Final Y Lang	Diff. final year- year 2 Lang	Sig (p-value)
IMML-mobility	62.16	65.43	3.27	0.00
Average	Y2 average	Final Y average	Diff. final year- year 2 average	Sig (p-value)
IMML-mobility	62.87	64.81	1.94	0.00
Independent sample T-tests				
	Y2 average - Y2 Lang	Y2 average - Y2 average	Final Y average - Final Y Lang	Final Y average - Final Y average
Diff. IMML - full-time	3.63	4.33	7.01	6.38
Diff. Sig (p-value)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
F-Equal variances assumed	35.50	142.62	65.05	184.49
T-test	5.92	7.40	12.71	11.98
Sig (p-value)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Bold italic numbers represent statistically significant at 1% or 5% level.

Table 3 Regression results of all sample students, N=815

	Y4 Lang	Y4 average
Constant	<i>29.83</i>	<i>31.32</i>
Sig (p-value)	0.00	0.00
Y 2 Lang and/or average	<i>0.62</i>	<i>0.64</i>
Sig (p-value)	0.00	0.00
IMML=1; full-time=0	<i>4.24</i>	<i>2.87</i>
Sig (p-value)	0.00	0.00
Gender (M=0; F=1)	-0.31	-0.07
Sig (p-value)	0.31	0.80
Age on entry	<i>-0.39</i>	<i>-0.54</i>
Sig (p-value)	0.02	0.00
Domicile (UK=1; international=0)	<i>0.76</i>	<i>1.10</i>
Sig (p-value)	0.02	0.00
Adjusted R square	<i>0.62</i>	<i>0.65</i>
F	265.98	297.65
Sig.	0.00	0.00
No of cases	815	815

Bold italic numbers represent statistically significant at 1% or 5% level.

Table 4 Regression results of sample students without missing data for socio-economic status and ethnicity, N=431

	Y4 Lang	Y4 average
Constant	38.56	36.09
Sig (p-value)	0.00	0.00
Y 2 Lang and/or average	0.54	0.59
Sig (p-value)	0.00	0.00
IMML=1; full-time=0	2.45	1.38
Sig (p-value)	0.00	0.00
Gender (M=0; F=1)	-0.35	0.13
Sig (p-value)	0.37	0.66
Age on entry	-0.54	-0.60
Sig (p-value)	0.05	0.00
Domicile (UK=1; international=0)	0.56	0.45
Sig (p-value)	0.35	0.30
NS-SEC1 (NS-SEC1=1; others=0)	0.10	0.15
Sig (p-value)	0.83	0.67
NS-SEC2 (NS-SEC2=1; others=0)	-0.05	0.06
Sig (p-value)	0.92	0.87
Ethnicity (white=1; others=0)	0.47	0.99
Sig (p-value)	0.48	0.04
Adjusted R square	0.47	0.57
F	47.89	72.06
Sig.	0.00	0.00
No of cases	431	431

Bold italic numbers represent statistically significant at 1% or 5% level.